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ABSTRACT

The absence of cultural diversity in the student body at Marietta College (Ohio) and in the surrounding public school sites has been a concern of the education department at Marietta College. To help provide an effective multicultural experience for preservice teachers, Marietta College built a cooperative student exchange program with Stillman College (Alabama), a historically black institution. The week-long program provided experiences in culturally, racially, and socioeconomically diverse classrooms. It also arranged for two Marietta education department faculty members to spend a week at Stillman College. While at Stillman, Marietta students roomed with Stillman students and were immersed in the daily life of the college. Each student spent a week observing and interacting in a public school classroom. They toured the city to view housing and living conditions. Feedback from students and faculty at both colleges indicated both personal and professional impact. There was a dramatic change in appreciation and understanding of cultural differences and similarities. Marietta College plans several more Stillman College trips. It has made a commitment to obtain resources to make the Stillman project campus-wide. (SM)

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Seeing the Island from the Other Shore: Attempts to Bring Together Teacher Education Students from Predominately White and Historically Black Institutions

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> I was the only white person in the room. This unique circumstance made me feel quite conspicuous at first. I assume that this is how minority students in my classroom will feel. I am fortunate to have had this experience not only for the empathy I will now be able to feel but for the first hand knowledge and appreciation I was able to develop for another culture.

These words from the reaction paper of a Marietta College student teacher were echoed both formally and informally by this student's peers who accompanied her on the initial multicultural field experience trip to Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. For the fifteen Marietta College seniors who spent a week living with Stillman students and participating in public school classrooms in Tuscaloosa city and county schools, the January pre-student teaching experience was an opportunity to be immersed in a culture quite different from their own.

Situated on the banks of the Ohio River, Marietta College is a small private liberal arts college of approximately 1100 students. Approximately 50 per cent of the student body are native Ohioans. The remaining students come primarily from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, or the New England states. The college is situated in a small quiet community. The student body, while drawn from a number of states, has a consistent institutional culture. The students are first or second generation college students, and come from communities and families whose values are molded by their middle class background. Over 95 per cent of Marietta College students are white.

The absence of cultural diversity in the student body at Marietta College and in the public school field sites in the surrounding area has been a concern of the education department at Marietta College. To insure that preservice teachers have the skills to adapt their teaching to individual learners from diverse cultural, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds and that they possess attitudes which will foster acceptance and appreciation of diverse cultures are goals which have been historically difficult for the Marietta College education department to achieve. These goals for the teacher education program are based on belief in the following assumptions:

1. It is increasingly important for political, social, economic, and educational reasons to recognize that the United States is a culturally diverse society.

2. Multicultural education is for all students.

3. Effective teaching is synonymous with multicultural education.

4. The education system has <u>not</u> served all students equally well.

5. Teachers are among the most important and influential people in the lives of children.

6. Classroom interaction between teachers and students constitutes a major part of the educational process.

7. Cultural immersion is an effective and desirable way for students to understand and appreciate cultural differences and similarities. (Hernandez, 1989)

To meet the goal of providing an effective multicultural experience for its preservice teachers, Marietta College has built the foundation for a cooperative program with Stillman College. Through this program, Marietta College students are able to experience the cultural immersion necessary for developing understanding and appreciation of cultural differences and similarities. A major focus of the program is what both students and faculty at the two institutions can learn from each other.

Located in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Stillman College has historically had a commitment to educate and serve black students. In most ways Stillman is a picture of a small liberal arts college found anywhere in America. Its primary aim is to prepare its students for lives which possess value and self-meaning. Yet, it must struggle with the more mundane concern of giving its students tools by which they can sustain an economic existence. The majors at Stillman reflect this struggle. A large percentage of the students major in business, education, social work, or other professional areas rather than in one of the traditional liberal arts disciplines. The institutional culture at Stillman is conditioned by its heritage and by the fact that the student population is 98 per cent black.

Beginning in the fall of 1989, the ground work was laid to begin a cooperative arrangement to benefit academic programs and multicultural awareness at both institutions. Through the

initial work of former Marietta College Dean Gwen Jensen and Stillman College Dean Joseph Gore, the Marietta College education department was able to begin the development of a student teacher exchange program. The program is designed to provide experiences in culturally, racially, and socioeconomically diverse classrooms for the preservice teachers involved. In addition, the two education departments are striving to promote a sharing among faculty members which will enhance multicultural aspects of teacher education programs at the two institutions.

Through a grant from the Brenlin Foundation of Akron, Ohio, Marietta College was able to send 15 student teachers and two education department faculty members to Stillman College for a week in January, 1990. Prior to leaving Marietta, many of the students displayed apprehension about the trip. For most of the group, this experience was to be their first direct contact with individuals who were culturally different . The students' apprehensive feelings were exhibited in concerns about living for a week with a Stillman roommate and misconceptions about their personal safety while on the campus and in the public schools.

While in Tuscaloosa, Marietta students were assigned to room with Stillman students in the campus dormitories. Efforts were made to insure that Marietta students were not all housed together on the same floor or in the same dormitory. Students from Marietta were immersed in the daily residence hall life of the Stillman student. A campus wide assembly to commemorate Martin Luther King's birthday was attended by the Marietta

students and faculty and was, for many in the group, the first time this observance had ever been anything more than a designated holiday on the calendar.

Through the cooperation of the Tuscaloosa City and Tuscaloosa County Schools, each Marietta student was assigned to a public school classroom where they spent the week observing and interacting with the teacher and students. A tour of the city provided students with an opportunity to view housing and living conditions of many of the Tuscaloosa public school students. Evening discussion sessions with Marietta College students and faculty, Stillman students and faculty, and area public school personnel enabled students to discuss and reflect upon the day's experiences in the classroom.

The positive results of the Marietta-Stillman experience are apparent in the feedback obtained from participating students and from Marietta and Stillman faculty and staff. Students continue to indicate that this experience impacted them both personally and professionally. It is evident to the Marietta College faculty that, through this brief but intense experience, there has indeed been a dramatic change in the students' appreciation and understanding of cultural differences and similarities.

The Marietta College education department has set a number of Stillman Project goals to be targeted in the near future. The January trip will be continued with an emphasis on increasing interaction between the Marietta students and the Stillman student teachers. Groundwork will be laid and funding obtained

for bringing a group of Stillman students and faculty to Marietta College and providing them with opportunities for participation in public school classrooms in southeastern Ohio. During their stay at Marietta, Stillman students and faculty will provide Marietta faculty with insight into attempts to work with multicultural issues in teacher education courses. Long range goals include lengthening the amount of time the groups of faculty and students are able to spend in this experience and exploring the possibilities for a faculty exchange between the two institutions.

At the institutional level, Marietta College has made a commitment to obtain the resources necessary to make the Stillman Project a campus-wide program. Interest in developing cooperative arrangements with Stillman has been shown by the departments of psychology, economics, management, and accounting, and petroleum engineering. The student teacher exchange program will become an integral part of this larger effort and will be financially supported through it.

The Stillman College and Marietta College faculty participating in this multicultural program believe the ultimate outcome for their teacher education students will be the ability to put into practice the motto "to teach them all is to know them all".

References

Hernandez, H. Multicultural Education: A Teacher's Guide to Content and Process. Columbus: Merrill Publishing Co.,1989.